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SERMON BY THE LATE RIGHT REV. BENJAMIN MOORE, D. D.

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ON THE TERRORS AND MERCIES OF GOD:

A Sermon,

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2 Cor. v. 11.—"*Knowing therefore the terror of the* LORD, *we persuade men.*"

THE powers of the human mind are very extensive, and of a very complicated nature. Our understanding enables us to judge of truth, and our passions impel us to action. Now, it is the great excellency of the holy Scriptures, that they address themselves to every faculty of the soul of man; informing our understanding by the most important truths; and pressing us, by the most powerful motives that can touch our affections, to a virtuous course of conduct. Sometimes they alarm our *fears*, and sometimes they animate our *hopes*. *Now*, they clothe the Deity with mercy and compassion to awaken our *love;* and now they surround Him with terrible majesty, to make us shrink from his frown, and dread the effects of his displeasure. But among all the sacred writers, St. Paul was the most conspicuous for knowledge both human and divine. He saw what an ample field for admonition and persuasion his religion opened before him; he was well acquainted with every avenue to the human heart; and we find him on all occasions employing, with great skill and energy, the most powerful arguments to deter men from vice, and win them to the love and practice of virtue. The wavering he confirmed; the weak he comforted; the obstinate he reproved; by the *mercies* of heaven he called

the world to repentance; and even by the *terror* of the LORD he persuaded men.

It shall be the business of the following discourse to show, how every Christian may be said, with St. Paul, to *know the terror of the* LORD; as we are made acquainted with it by the history of past transactions; by our own present experience; and by that Revelation which has been afforded us of the most tremendous scenes to be displayed, on some future day, before the whole assembly of angels and men. And this will open the way for some very important inferences; so that from these considerations we may persuade men to avert, while they have opportunity, the effects of GOD'S displeasure; and to receive and improve all the gracious offers of his love.

The voice of reason proclaims to every rational creature the *terror of the* LORD. We cannot look round on the stupendous works of creation, without being filled with trembling astonishment at the greatness of *his* power, who called them forth from nothing, and still preserves them in existence. Upon this principle He is said, in the holy Scriptures, to be surrounded with *dreadful majesty*, and to be *terrible* in all his works. On this subject the sacred writers employ the utmost sublimity of expression; all his creatures, animate and inanimate, are represented as subservient to his will, proclaiming the glory of his majesty, and the greatness of his power. "Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance; behold, He taketh up the isles as a very little thing. He measureth the waters in the hollow of his hand. He meteth out heaven with a span, and comprehendeth the dust of the earth in a measure, and weigheth the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance. He bowed the heavens and came down, and it was dark under his feet. He rode upon the cherubims, and did fly; He came flying upon the wings of the wind. He made darkness his secret place; his pavilion round about him with dark water, and thick clouds to cover him." What sublime descriptions of the almighty power of GOD are these! The necessary inference therefore is, "Tremble, thou earth, at the presence of the LORD!" Can any

sinful mortal turn his thoughts into this channel of reflection, and not sink down with abasement and terror? What a fearful thing must it be to fall into the hands of this great and living GOD! Should His wrath be awakened; should his strength be armed against us, to render us miserable, resistance would be vain; every attempt to escape from His all-comprehending power would be fruitless; we must be *consumed* before the blasting of the breath of His displeasure.

We find, from the history of all nations, that the mind of man has ever been impressed with awful notions of the greatness of that Power which originally produced, and still preserves, this grand and beautiful system of things. But these impressions, however universal, have never been sufficient to restrain the children of men from the commission of sin. They perceive that the power of the Deity is not always immediately exerted to punish transgression, and to vindicate the honor of his laws; and thus they delude themselves with the persuasion, that they may *continue* to transgress, and shall finally escape the inflictions of divine justice; and therefore need not be influenced by "the terror of the LORD" to keep his commandments. To correct this fatal delusion, we are informed, that GOD has thought proper, at different times, to interpose his authority; and by tremendous judgments, to display his terrible majesty in the immediate punishment of sin. When the rebellious spirits rose up in heaven against the Omnipotent, they found a speedy vengeance pursuing the vain attempt; they were degraded from their exalted state of glory; driven from the celestial abodes; and are now reserved in everlasting chains under darkness against the judgment of the great day. In the time of Noah, when GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually, it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth; so he sent the flood, which swept all the wicked away. When the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah was great, and their sin was very grievous, the LORD reigned upon those devoted cities brimstone and fire from heaven; and overthrew those cities, and all the inhabitants of them, and that

which grew upon the ground. When Pharaoh hardened his heart against the command of the LORD, and refused to let the children of Israel go, GOD sent all his plagues upon the land of Egypt; smote their first-born, and overwhelmed their hosts in the midst of the sea. Even at the delivery of the Law, on Mount Sinai, which was intended to be a blessing to His people, so dreadful was the majesty with which GOD surrounded himself, that the whole camp of Israel trembled. In this manner the terror of the LORD had been displayed. With these instances St. Paul was well acquainted. But even supposing him to have been ignorant of transactions which had occurred so many ages before; from his own experience, from the revelations that were made immediately to himself, he might, with propriety, have used the expression of the text. When he was journeying toward Damascus, breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of JESUS CHRIST, suddenly there shined round about him a great light from heaven; and from the glory that overwhelmed him issued forth a tremendous voice, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" Unable to support himself through this awful scene, "he fell to the earth, and trembling and astonished, said, LORD, what wilt thou have me to do?"

But never was the terror of the LORD exhibited before the world in a more striking light, than in the passion and crucifixion of JESUS CHRIST. Men had become guilty before heaven; it was necessary that an atonement should be made for them; that GOD's utter abhorrence of sin should be testified in the strongest manner. He therefore spares not his only-begotten Son, but delivers him up for the iniquity of us all. At the astonishing spectacle of his sufferings, all nature was thrown into convulsions; the sun veiled his face, the earth quaked, the graves were opened, and the dead arose.

If we believe the records of Holy Scripture to be the words of truth and soberness, the instances which have now been recounted of the divine vengeance that has formerly pursued sin, ought to have an immediate influence on our conduct. The GOD whom we serve is the same yesterday, to-day, and

or ever; at all times equally displeased with iniquity, and equally able, by terrible punishments, to make his displeasure known.

But it may be said, "Do we not now perceive all things come alike to all? Do the wicked come into any more misfortunes than other folks; or, from the circumstances of their lives, do they appear to be more the objects of the indignation of heaven?" However calm and complacent they may appear to be, however they may be surrounded with the sunshine of worldly prosperity, there are "terrors of the LORD," and those of a very aggravated nature, which continually set themselves in array against them; the terrors which arise from the stings of a guilty conscience, and from the forebodings of a future judgment.

The voice of conscience is the voice of GOD. Its whispers of approbation are pleasant to the soul, and are sometimes sufficient to fill us with strength and consolation amidst the *severest* temporal calamities. But so powerful, so terrible are its reproaches, that they are able to imbitter, or entirely to *destroy* every gratification arising from the objects of sense. You may run the giddy round of sensual joy; clothe yourselves "in purple and fine linen," and fare "sumptuously every day;" you may, for a moment, deem your bliss as secure as it is exquisite; but before the tremendous voice of a condemning conscience, these phantoms of happiness instantly disappear; the visionary fabric is at once shaken to pieces, and falls to the earth. After the murder of the holy Baptist, of what avail to the impious Herod were all the attendants of royalty, the robe of state, or the sumptuous entertainment, or the splendid retinue, or the flatteries of fawning courtiers? His peace was gone for ever; there was the sound of an enemy continually at hand, "I am come to requite thee for all thy wickedness." It sometimes, indeed, happens, that these terrors of the LORD do not immediately rise up, in their full force, to check the progress of the unrighteous. They go on, for a season, with apparent unconcern. But let them fall into some unexpected distress, and they immediately see the wrath of heaven armed

against their crimes; confounded and dismayed, they look upon every stroke of misfortune as a direct infliction of almighty vengeance. The brethren of Joseph suppressed their remorse for the inhuman treatment which their brother had received from them, till they were questioned as spies, cast into prison, and apprehended that their lives were in danger. It was then, "they said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us."

But all the temporal calamities which have hitherto been inflicted on wilful iniquity, all the distresses which, in our present state, arise from the operations of a guilty conscience, are not to be compared to that terror of the LORD, which will be displayed before the *whole world* of rational creatures, on the *great* and *awful* day of *final judgment!* *This* St. Paul had particularly in view when he expressed the words of the text. In the verse immediately preceding, he declares, "We must all appear before the judgment seat of CHRIST, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." At this decisive moment, "if the *righteous scarcely* are saved, where shall the sinner and the ungodly appear?" Frail child of the dust! how wilt thou be able to lift up thy face before that dread Tribunal, or bear the awful majesty which surrounds thy Judge? See! the hand of desolation has seized the material universe; the earth melts with fervent heat; the sun is turned into darkness, and the moon into blood! the heavens are wrapped together as a scroll, they vanish away! Look beyond these dissolving worlds, and behold, *He*, to whom all judgment is committed, the Son of GOD appears! He comes surrounded with thousands and ten thousands of the heavenly host, hailing Him with shouts of exultation and songs of triumph. The whole assembly of men is gathered before him. And now, with overflowing gratitude and joy, the righteous hear the final sentence which fixes their happiness for ever. But, O *terrible*

denunciation of *just* judgment, which consigns the wicked to everlasting wretchedness !

But for what purpose is a preacher of the Gospel thus to lay before you the terror of the LORD ? Is it *merely* to disturb the peace and happiness of your lives ? Is it to impress you with perplexing notions of the inflexible severity of GOD ? Is it to drive you to desperation ; to make you regardless of the means of grace, and to banish from your hearts the hopes of glory ? Far from every benevolent bosom be such a design as this. No ! it is that we may the more *effectually* "persuade men" to pursue the things which belong to their peace. It is, that by pointing out to them their danger, and alarming them with the apprehension of evil to come, we may prepare them for a more ready reception of the gracious promises of the Gospel. It is, that we may incline their hearts to attend *more earnestly* to *all* the subjects of admonition and persuasion, with which we are so abundantly furnished by our holy religion.

A view of the beauty of virtue, the love of order and regularity in the moral world, may be motives of sufficient force to have some influence upon the *considerate* and tender mind. But men, in general, are to be impelled to the discharge of their duty, by impressing them with alarming apprehensions of the danger which attends disobedience. Terror is an argument of universal influence ; it strikes deep, and is level to the understanding of every man. Upon this principle are enforced most of the laws of human society. The grateful returns of benevolence may be prompted by expressions of love, by the hopes of a proposed reward ; but the strict execution of justice is best obtained by the dread of punishment. Take away the penalty of the law, and society runs, at once, into disorder and confusion. It is not therefore without reason, that the precepts of GOD's holy word are enforced by threats, as well as by promises ; by addresses to our fears, as well as to our hopes. *He*, however, who wishes well to the souls of men, and is desirous to promote their happiness in the most skilful and effectual manner, will ever remember that different motives are to be applied to different dispositions. When the passions are

turbulent and headstrong; when the heart, by *long* habits of transgression, is become *hard* and insensible; it is *then* that the severest remedies are to be used; it is *then* that we must *rouse* the sinner from his fatal lethargy, by a forceful representation of all the *terrors* of the law of GOD! But let us not distress the humble and penitent, the meek and affectionate, by pointing to the threatening storms of divine vengeance. Rather let us gently lead them to turn and view the rising of the Sun of righteousness. Under His genial influences, see how all nature declares the loving-kindness of GOD. His "tender mercies are over all his works." When St. Paul was preaching before Felix, an old and stubborn offender, he reasoned with so much energy "of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come," that "*Felix trembled!*" But, on another occasion, when Agrippa discovered the sensibility of his heart, from that pathetic exclamation, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian;" the Apostle replies with the utmost tenderness, "Would to GOD, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both *almost* and *altogether* such as I am, except these bonds."

The arguments of persuasion which our religion affords, are very numerous, and of a very *powerful* nature. If from the *terror* of the LORD we are sometimes to attempt to persuade you, how much more agreeable to every ingenuous bosom must our persuasion be, when it dwells upon his gentleness and mercy! This is a subject never to be exhausted by the limited powers of the human understanding. Only recollect, that He hath created you what you are, beings "fearfully and wonderfully made," both in body and soul; that He hath hitherto preserved you in existence; that He hath redeemed you from death eternal, when you had forfeited all title to his favor; and that He hath laid before you the offers of everlasting life, which your own merits could never have obtained. And are not these motives of sufficient force to incline every grateful heart to comply cheerfully with the requisitions of so gracious a Benefactor?

For, to what do we endeavor to persuade you? Is it to

endure pain and forego pleasure? Is it to sacrifice any real good, or to incur the hazard of any dreadful evil? No; we would persuade the *wicked* to turn from the *error* of his ways and live, so that iniquity may not be his ruin; the *good* to continue steadfastly to the end in well doing. We would persuade the *young* to begin early to fear the LORD; and the *old* to claim *Him* as their best support, and their heritage for ever. We would persuade all those who profess and call themselves Christians, to seek diligently for the way of truth; and when they have found it, to hold the faith that was "once delivered to the saints," "in unity of spirit, in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life." By all the motives which ought to influence reasonable creatures, "why will ye die, O house of Israel? Rather turn ye, and live;" so that in the great day of final judgment ye may hear the gracious declaration, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." There, the terrible majesty of the ALMIGHTY will cease to alarm the heirs of glory; for they rejoice under the delightful consciousness that his power will be exerted to render them for ever happy. There no longer will there be any necessity for argument, admonition, or persuasion; for the will of GOD will be performed with unceasing alacrity; like the angels, they will then excel in strength; they will cheerfully fulfil his commandment; they will gratefully hearken unto the voice of his word. There the universal language of triumph will be, "O praise the LORD, all ye his hosts; ye servants of his that do his pleasure! O speak good of the LORD, all ye works of his, in all places of his dominion. Praise thou the LORD, O my soul!"

LINES

Written by the late Bishop Benjamin Moore, of New-York, for a lady who was afflicted with a lingering and distressing malady.

O Power supreme! to thee my thoughts I turn,
Thou only comfort, when we truly mourn;
The orphan's Parent, and the wretched's Friend!
To Thee my trembling knees I humbly bend:
O arm my soul the strokes of fate to fear,
And check the impetuous torrent of despair;
Teach me submission to thy awful doom,
To see thy mercy through misfortune's gloom.
Still with this sacred truth my heart inform,
To guide my steps through life's uncertain storm,
That thou, who dost in nought but good delight,
Hast order'd all, and therefore *as is right.*